AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing Of Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1.   (Currently Amended) A method for providing and utilizing an improved communications channel for establishing and maintaining a telephone conference, the method comprising:

receiving at a client computer a request to initiate a telephone conference, said request identifying two or more participants for the telephone conference;

in response to the request, transmitting an instant message including data for establishing the telephone conference between the participants to an instant messaging server computer;

receiving the instant message at the instant messaging server computer~~; and~~

forwarding the instant message to a telephone conference gateway computer;

receiving the instant message at the telephone conference gateway computer, extracting from the instant message the data for establishing the telephone conference, creating a web services request based on the data, and executing the web services request in order to establish the telephone conference<u>; and</u>

<u>receiving at the telephone conference gateway computer an indication that a telephone call has been placed to one of the participants and that the telephone call is in a ringing state.</u>

2. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the instant message comprises a message formatted according to a session initiation protocol.

3. (Original) The method of Claim 2, wherein the data for establishing the telephone conference comprises extensible markup language data formatted according to a simple object access protocol.

4. (Original) The method of Claim 3, wherein the instant messaging server computer is operative to authenticate the client computer and the telephone conference gateway computer.

5. (Original) The method of Claim 4, wherein extracting from the instant message the data for establishing the telephone conference comprises extracting the extensible markup language data and wherein creating a web services request based on the data comprises created a web services request based on the extensible markup language data.

6. (Original) The method of Claim 5, wherein executing the web services request in order to establish the telephone conference comprises transmitting the web services request to a conference web service, and wherein the conference web service is operative to cause a conference bridge to initiate the telephone conference according to the extensible markup language data.

7.   (Currently Amended) The method of Claim [[6]] 1, further comprising:

~~receiving at the telephone conference gateway computer an indication that a~~ ~~telephone call has been placed to one of the participants and that the telephone call is~~ ~~in a ringing state, the indication being received as a web services request;~~

converting the indication that a telephone call has been placed to an instant message at the telephone conference gateway, the instant message including data indicating that the telephone call is in a ringing state;

transmitting the instant message to the instant messaging server computer;

forwarding the instant message from the instant messaging server computer to the client computer; and

receiving the instant message at the client computer, extracting from the instant message the data indicating that the call is in a ringing state, and displaying data at the client computer indicating that the call is in a ringing state.

8.   (Original) The method of Claim 7, further comprising:

receiving at the telephone conference gateway an indication that the telephone call has been answered by one of the participants, the indication being received as a web services request;

converting the indication to an instant message at the telephone conference gateway, the instant message including data indicating that the telephone call has been answered;

transmitting the instant message to the instant messaging server computer;

forwarding the instant message from the instant messaging server computer to the client computer; and

receiving the instant message at the client computer, extracting from the instant message the data indicating that the call has been answered, and displaying data at the client computer indicating that the call has been answered.

9.   (Original) The method of Claim 8, further comprising:

receiving at the client computer a request to disconnect one of the participants from the telephone conference;

in response to the request, transmitting an instant message including data for requesting that the participant be disconnected from the telephone conference;

receiving the instant message at the instant messaging server computer, and forwarding the instant message to the telephone conference gateway computer;

receiving the instant message at the telephone conference gateway computer, extracting from the instant message the data requesting that the participant be disconnected, creating a web services request based on the data, and executing the web services request in order to disconnect the participant from the phone conference.

10.   (Original) The method of Claim 8, further comprising:

receiving at the telephone conference gateway an indication that a participant has disconnected from the telephone conference, the indication being received as a web services request;

converting the indication to an instant message at the telephone conference gateway, the instant message including data indicating that the participant has disconnected from the telephone conference;

transmitting the instant message to the instant messaging server computer;

forwarding the instant message from the instant messaging server computer to the client computer; and

receiving the instant message at the client computer, extracting from the instant message the data indicating that the participant has disconnected from the telephone conference, and displaying data at the client computer indicating that the participant has disconnected.

11.   (Currently Amended) A system for providing and utilizing an improved communications channel for establishing and maintaining a telephone conference, the system comprising:

a client application program operative to:

transmit an instant message to an instant messaging server computer, the instant message including data requesting that a telephone conference between two or more participants be established, and

display data extracted from an instant message received at the client computer indicating that a placed telephone call associated with the requested telephone conference is in a ringing state;

a gateway application program operative to:

receive the instant message from the instant messaging server computer,

to extract from the instant message the data requesting that a telephone conference be established,

to create a web services request based on the data, and

to transmit the web services request to a network device capable of establishing the telephone conference,

receive an indication that a telephone call has been placed to one of the participants and that the telephone call is in a ringing state,

convert the indication that a telephone call has been placed to the instant message indicating that a placed telephone call associated with the requested telephone conference is in a ringing state, and

transmit the instant message to the instant messaging server computer, wherein the instant messaging server computer is operative to forward the instant message to the client application program.

12.   (Original) The system of Claim 11, wherein the messages transmitted between the client application program and the instant messaging server computer are formatted according to a session initiation protocol.

13.   (Original) The system of Claim 12, wherein the data requesting that a telephone conference between two or more participants be established comprises extensible markup language data formatted according to a simple object access protocol.

14.   (Original) The system of Claim 13, wherein the messages transmitted between the gateway application program and the instant messaging server computer are formatted according to the session initiation protocol.

15.   (Original) The system of Claim 14, wherein the messages transmitted between the gateway application program and the network device capable of establishing the telephone conference are web services requests.

16.   (Original) The system of Claim 15, wherein the gateway application program is operative to receive a web services request indicating that a participant has been added to a telephone conference or that a participant has exited from a telephone conference, and to transmit an instant message formatted according to the session initiation protocol to the instant messaging server computer indicating the addition or removal of the participant from the telephone conference.

17.   (Original) The system of Claim 16, wherein the client application program is operative to receive a request to add a participant to a telephone conference or to remove a participant from a telephone conference and to transmit an instant message formatted according to the session initiation protocol to the gateway application program requesting the addition or removal of the participant from the telephone conference.

18.   (Original) An apparatus for providing and utilizing an improved communications channel for establishing and maintaining a telephone conference, the apparatus comprising:

a computer for executing a client application program, the application program operative to:

transmit an instant message to an instant messaging server computer, the instant message including data requesting that a telephone conference between one or more participants be established, the instant message being formatted according to a session initiation protocol,

receive an instant message indicating that a telephone call associated with the telephone conference has been placed, and

display data extracted from the received instant message indicating that the placed telephone call is in a ringing state.

19.   (Original) The apparatus of Claim 18, wherein the client application program is further operative to receive a request to disconnect one of the participants from the telephone conference and, in response to the request, to transmit an instant message including data for requesting that the participant be disconnected from the telephone conference to the instant messaging server computer.

20.   (Currently Amended) An apparatus for providing and utilizing an improved communications channel for establishing and maintaining a telephone conference, the apparatus comprising:

a computer for executing a gateway application program operative to:

receive an instant message from an instant messaging server computer,

~~to~~ extract from the instant message data requesting that a telephone conference be established,

~~to~~ create a web services request based on the data, ~~and~~

~~to~~ transmit the web services request to a network device capable of establishing the telephone conference,

receive an indication that a telephone call has been placed to one of the participants and that the telephone call is in a ringing state,

convert the indication that a telephone call has been placed to the instant message indicating that a placed telephone call associated with the requested telephone conference is in a ringing state, and

transmit the instant message to the instant messaging server computer, wherein the instant messaging server computer is operative to forward the instant message to the client application program.